CONTRIBUTION OF MITHILA TO VEDIC CULTURE

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Mithilā is one of the most ancient landmarks in Indian history. It continuously led India in all spheres of life through the ages. The ancient Maithilas (the inhabitant of Mithilā region irrespective of religion, caste and creed are generally called as Maithilas) and their kings were as renowned for their love of learning as they were feared for their prowess in arms. They were as rich in their material possessions as in their mental and spiritual endowments. Their name today stands for culture and wealth just as it did in ancient days.

In the present note an attempt has been made to investigate the elements contributed by Mithilā to vedic culture, the region of which is a combination of certain distinct cultural units like the erstwhile modern districts of Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Camparan, Saharsa, Purnea, north Monghyr and north Bhagalpur, as well as the Terai under Nepal lying between the district and lower ranges of the Himālayas.

The *Atharva*[1] and *Yajus*[2] *Saṃhitās* divide India into four quarters, viz., North, South, East and West, and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*,[3] one of the oldest of the *Brāhmaṇas* avers that the rulers in the East were designated '*Jamrāt*', 'suzerain lord', holding sway over 'sāmrājyas' or empires, evidently more powerful and more extensive than the simple rājyas of the Midland. That this was historically true is proved by the fact that in Brāhmaṇa age we find Janaka of Mithilā addressed as '*Samrāṭ*' by the great sages assembled at his court. What we know of the administrative system of the Mauryas under Chandragupta and his grandson, Aśoka, tells us plainly that it was imperialistic that provinces after conquest were incorporated in the empire, and governed by Viceroys sent from the imperial capital, and not by the scions of those killed in war or removed from the throne. Imperialism was thus the gift of Mithilā to Indo-Aryan culture in the Vedic Age, as early as the epoch of the Brāhmaṇas. It is

1. *Av.* iii. 27, xii.
2. *Ts.* iv. 4, 12.2; *Vāj S.*, xv. 10-14.
3. *Ait. Br.*, viii-4.

possible that 'Emperorship' (*Sāmrājya*) had been in India even earlier, in the *Ṛgvedic* Age itself: because the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* speaks of empires in the east in amplification and explanation of a Ṛgvedic passage[4] which reads 'Niṣasāda dhṛitavrato Varuṇaḥ pastyāśvā/Sāmarājyāya Sukratuḥ' and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*[5] amplifies it thus—'Niṣasāda dhṛitavrato varuṇaḥ pastyāśvā Sāmrājyāya, bhaujyādhipatyāya, svāvaśyāyātiṣṭhāya Sukraturiti'. Here we observe that in place of the single 'Sāmrājya' of the *Ṛgveda* the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* introduces the names of all the forms of government that were in existence in the various parts of India, and it adds in explanation that the '*Sāmrājya*' form of government was a characteristic institution of eastern India.

The *Mahābhārata* tells us of one very important thing contributed by Mithilā to Vedic culture, viz., the compilation of the śukla or purified *Yajurveda* by Yajñavalkya. The *udyaga parva* (chapter 108) records that Suparṇa was narrating to the sage Gālava the special merits of each of the four quarters of India, divided as in the vedic *Saṁhitas* and Brāhmaṇas, taking his stand, it seems, about Prayāga which was on the partition line Śravatī-Ayodhyā—Prayāga between western and eastern India. Among many of the special contributions of eastern India to vedic culture, Suparṇa asserts that in the east 'was recited to the chanters of the vedas the savitri by savitā, the sun-god, and here also were given the yajus by the Sun'. The authorship of Yājñavalkya to the *Śukla-yajurveda* is too well-known to require much demonstration; it is asserted by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* itself: 'The Śukla (Pure) Yajus verses coming from Aditya have been proclaimed by Yājñavalkya vājasaneya'.[6] That Yājñavalkya belonged to Mithilā appears from other parts of the same Brāhmaṇa. Here we may note that the *Śatapatha* is the only Brāhmaṇa work mentioned by name in the *Mahābhārata* which also quotes it (xii. 3+2, 13-14), and the story of the *Vājasaneyi-Samhitā* and the *śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* by Yājñavalkya is narrated in the *Śāntiparva* in detail (Chapter 318-19).

The predominance of the Vasiṣṭhas in Mithilā is amply demonstrated by Buddhist literature. The great Lichchavis of Vaiśātā are addres-

4. *Ṛv*, I. 25, 10.
5. *Ait. Br.*, viii. 13.
6. *Br. Up.*, 6. 4, 23.

sed as Vasiṣṭhas in the *Mahavastu Avadān*[7] and Kshatriyānī Triśulā, the mother of Mahāvīra, belonged, the *Jaina Sūtras* tell us, to the Vasiṣṭha gotra.[8] Moreover, the *Vanaparva* places the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha at the confluence of the Kosi, evidently in Mithilā.[9] Here *Udyoga Parva* (108, 13) tells us that the Ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha was born, won his renown, and met with his death, all in Eastern India.

The important group of Ṛgvedic seers, intimately connected with Mithilā with Aṅga-consists of the ancient Ṛṣi Dīrghatamas, his son Kakṣīvān, and the latter's daughter, Ghoṣā; these three together contributed a fairly large number of hymns to the *Ṛgveda* With reference to an obscure hymn contributed by Dīrghatamas to the *Ṛgveda* (I. 158), Saunaka in his *Bṛhaddevatā* (iv. 21-24) shows how the hymn refers to events in the seer's own life, and without a knowledge of these facts the hymn would be unintelligible. Kātyāyana in his *Sarvānukramani*[10] refers to it in his own cryptic way. Dīrghatamas, in the story told by Saunaka and amplified by *Ṣaḍguruśiṣya* in his *vedārthadīpikā*[11] was rescued from a watery grave in the waters of the ganges by the king of Aṅga who honoured him and gave him a habitation and a home. The Ṛṣi took to wife a Śūdra woman, Usiji, a seer well-known in the *Ṛgveda*[12] as the author of a number of hymns. The *Vanaparva* (ch. 21 & 84) of the *Mahābhārata* places the residence of this great seer at Rājagṛha, the Magadh capital, where he had evidently settled. Ghoṣā, the daughter of Kakṣīvān, appears from her own statements made in hymns contributed by herself to the *Ṛgveda* (x. 39-40), to have remained unmarried to a pretty advanced age owing to some physical defect, and then by the favour of the gods found, rather late in life, a husband and a home.

Other sons are said to have been begotten by Dirghatamas according to the *Mahābhārata* (I. 104) and the *Purāṇas*, for the childless king of Aṅga, and these partitioned their father's extensive empire among themselves, giving their names to the provinces they ruled—Aṅga, Vanga,

7. Ed. Senart, Vol. i, p. 283
8. *SBE*, xxii, pp. xxi, 193
9. *Mbh.* iii. 84
10. *Anie. oxoniensia*, I, Ch. iv. p. 9
11. *Ibid.*, p. 93
12. *Rv.*, i. 18. 1

Kalinga, Puṇḍra, and Suhma (*Mbh.*, I, 104). Evidently in this legend is preserved a tradition of historical value, showing that in vedic times the Aṅga empire included Bengal and Orissa in its domain, and such '*Sāmrājyas*' were common in Eastern India, we are told by the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*.

If we take the story narrated by Śaunaka and the *Mahābhārata* as correct, then the number of hymns of the *Ṛgveda* composed in the region of Mithilā becomes considerable, and there is no reason why we should not believe the tradition recorded by them. Aṅga were certainly very well-known to the *Atharva-Veda*, a hymn in which sends *Takman* or fever to these countries, apparently referring to the swamps of the lower Gaṅges. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (II. 9) also speaks of Aṅga.

There was a school of Prāchya or Eastern School of the Padapāṭha of the *Ṛgveda* side by side with the rival school of Pañcāla, and besides, with the fact noted in the *Vāyupurāṇa* (Ch. 99), while dealing with the history of the propagation of the *Vedas* that the *Sāmaveda* had an East Indian School, that of the *Prācya-Sāmagas* with 500 variations, distinguished from the Udicya or northern *Sāmagas*,[13] go to show that the *Vedas* were very closely studied in Eastern India.

Now we refer to the story of King Videgha Māthava and his Purohita, Gotama Rāhūgaṇa, carrying Agni Vaiśvānara to Videha, which is narrated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (I. 4.1, 10-20) and has been taken by scholars to tell the story of the propagation of Vedic culture to Eastern India from the west. But it does nothing of the kind, telling only of the introduction of a particular sacrificial rite, it was ritual that prospered most in the Vedic Midland. But even in ritual Māthava Videgha's purohita, Gotama Rāhūgaṇa, is credited, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XI. 4.3, 20), with the discovery of the Mitravindā sacrifice, which is further said to have been revived by Emperor Janaka, through Yājñavalkya. Besides, earlier still, Nami Sapya, King of Videha (Vaideho Rājā), is held up, in the *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa* (XXV. 10, 7) as a memorable example of a monarch who successfully performed elaborate sacrifices and thereby reached heaven. As this king appears in several passages in the *Ṛgveda* (VI. 20, 6; x. 48, 9; I. 53, 7) he belongs to a very early period in the

13. *Mat. P.*, Ch. 49; *Bhāg P.*, ix. 21.

development of vedic culture in India; the last passage referred to here (*Ṛv.*, I. 53, 7) says that Namī was the friend and associate of Indra in quelling the Asura Namuci and the first Ṛv., VI. 20, 6) says that in the fight with Namuci Indra protected Namī Sāpya.

In the light of above stated facts, it can safely be said that Mithilā, had made no mean contribution to the growth and development of vedic culture in India. This remark will suggest a fruitful line of investigation for unravelling the history of the origin and development of Indian culture, by a study of the *Vedas* in the light thrown upon many an obscure passage by the *Epics* and the *Purāṇas*.

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